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ABSTRACT

This single-site case study was designed to investigate ways in which a principal considers the individual needs of faculty members when promoting a particular change, as perceived by faculty and staff. Four research questions were addressed: (1) How does a principal create a context for change? (2) Is school culture acknowledged as an integral consideration in the process and, if so, in what ways? (3) Does the principal address individuals before considering the system and, if so, in what ways? and (4) What are other realities integral to the change process? Interview questions were presented to nine faculty and staff members of Apple Valley Elementary School, including the principal. Data analysis shows that the majority of respondents viewed the change process as a team effort with principal as facilitator of dialogue and teachers as communicative participants. The principal was viewed as the key change agent who purposely created a context for change. School cultural factors such as shared beliefs, attitudes, and norms were important in shaping the context for successful change. School administrators should carefully consider both individual and group needs of faculty members when promoting a particular change. Knowledge generated from this study can also be helpful in designing professional development for educators. (Contains 38 references.) (RT)

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The School Principal as Change Agent:

An Explanatory Case Study

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Abstract

Using an explanatory case study approach, in this paper we describe faculty and staff perspectives regarding the principal's consideration of the needs of individual teachers when implementing schoolwide change. Data collected from interviews, observations, and a review of documents and other artifacts was analyzed through the lenses of SEDL's (1995) creating a context for change, Hall and Hord's (1987) Stages of Concern, Fullan's (1991) theories of the principal as key, and Schön's (1987) approach to reflective practice in action.

The School Principal as Change Agent:

An Explanatory Case Study

> When I consider the kind of fundamental reform I'm interested in, I can think about teachers, but only one by one, not as a collective, not as a school staff. That is because change doesn't happen to collectives; only individuals change. And I can't change them; they must change themselves.
>
> I can't bring about education reform as long as I keep thinking about education as an institution. I can't get there from here. But there are bridges that can be built and crossed; individual teachers and administrators can be helped to think about the nature of their work. Together, we can slowly change who we are as individuals and hereby change the collective. It's not something we can do quickly; there are no neat recipes for reforming the institution of schooling.
>
> Fundamental change simply doesn't happen that way. (Newman, 1998, p. 288)

The educational literature of the past 30 years has provided a wealth of models and theoretical frameworks on the implementation of effective and successful change (Ainscow, Hargreaves, Hopkins, Balshaw, & Black-Hawkins, 1994; Fullan, 1991; Schmoker, 1996; Southwest Educational Development Laboratory {SEDL}, 1995). Despite this focus on school improvement through change, the overall structure and process of the American educational system remains much the same as it has for decades (Fullan, 1997; Tyack & Cuban, 1995). "Despite the consistency and specificity of research findings on the impact of collaborative work cultures and professional learning communities, we do not seem to be gaining ground on educational reform" (Fullan, 1997, p. 227).

Like Newman (1998), we speculate that the focus of change should begin at the interpersonal level; a change in the unit of analysis from the "system" to the "individual" (Fullan, 1991; Schön, 1987; SEDL, 1995) may heighten success. The culture of a school is difficult to

change, in part, because change may first need to occur within the individual, and schools are composed of many individuals with differing perspectives at different stages within the process of change.

Purpose of the Study

This study was designed to investigate, from the perspectives of faculty and staff, the ways in which the principal considers the individual needs of faculty members when promoting a particular change. Specifically, we wanted to describe the following: (1) How a principal creates a context for change, (2) if and in what ways school culture is acknowledged as an integral consideration in that process, (3) if and in what ways the principal addresses individuals before considering the system, and (4) other realities integral to the change process.

Orienting Theoretical/Conceptual Framework

Multiple lenses frame this study. Fullan (1991) stresses the importance of the individual when implementing successful change, whether the person is the initiator or the recipient of the change. "Assume that any significant innovation, if it is to result in change, requires individual implementers to work out their own meaning" (p. 106) because "in the final analysis each individual must decide on a course of action for himself or herself" (p. xii). Change must occur at the individual level first; "there is no evidence that widespread involvement at the initiation stage is either feasible or effective" (p. 91).

He continues by linking the role of principal as change facilitator to self-reflection. Fullan (1991) notes that "the starting point from the individual principal's point of view should be a reflection on whether his or her own *conception* of the role of principal has built-in limitations regarding change" (p. 167). Also, a principal's developed meaning about change and the change process will affect the entire organization and determine whether the principal will

work for or against the proposed changes. "The starting point for improvement is not system change, not change in others around us, but change in ourselves" (p. 167). Fullan (1991) encourages principals to talk with teachers about their views and critically reflect on their position.

Fullan (1991) also notes that "the principal is central, especially to changes in the culture of the school" (p. 145). In the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory's (SEDL; 1995) six-part framework for facilitating successful change in schools, the first component, creating a context for change, describes the range of cultural factors that must be incorporated for consideration such as attitudes and beliefs, norms, and relationships. Attitudes and beliefs are defined as value statements that are either positive, negative, or neutral; these are based on personal perceptions. Norms are the actual representation of these beliefs, or what usually happens in practice. Relationships are identified as the personification of the norms, or personal interactions that occur as a result of the implementation of norms. SEDL's parameters link with Hall and Hord's (1987) six stages of concern about school innovations which recognize that change is an ongoing process, and not everyone will be at the same stage at the same time. Principals must learn individual teachers' concerns, and then know how to respond to those concerns with appropriate contextually and individually bounded interventions.

Schön (1987) speaks of dialogue within the context of a "professional practice." When practitioners share commonalties such as media, languages, tools, institutions, units of activity, and common body of professional knowledge, they are members of a practitioner community. This analogy could be likened to a school setting. Within the school community, principals may be the "coaches" and teachers the "students." Schön summarizes the coaching task as a threefold activity: addressing the problems of the task, tailoring actions to the particular student,

and relationship-building so that learning may take place. This is the basis of a "reflective practicum."

> The reflective practicum should include ways in which competent practitioners cope with the constraints of their organizational settings. . . . And here a constructionist perspective is critically important; for the phenomena of practice in organizations are crucially determined by the kinds of reality individuals create for themselves, the ways they frame and shape their worlds - and what happens when people with similar and different ways of framing reality come into collision. (p. 322)

Procedures

This single-site case study employed qualitative techniques for data collection and analysis. Data sources consisted primarily of information gained from the school principal, faculty and staff members. Interview prompts were designed to address the research questions; generally, open-ended questions were formulated to examine various perspectives on how the principal had successfully facilitated the change process among faculty members. Short interviews with members of the staff and faculty were conducted as a cross-check of the principal's comments. Observations of faculty and grade-level meetings with the principal were recorded and coded. In addition, documents were examined to gain further insight into the school culture and types/levels of interaction among participants. Documents included items such as memorandums to teachers, agendas from faculty meetings, and school handbooks. Artifacts (objects within the physical setting) were also examined and incorporated into observational notes to give insight into cultural beliefs and attitudes.

Research Site

The research site for this case study was Apple Valley Elementary School, one of 13

elementary schools located in an upper middle class, urban school district of more than 68,000 students. Racial distribution within the school was representative of the district as a whole, with approximately 87% Caucasian, 6% African American, and the remaining 7% being an even distribution of Asian, Hispanic, and Native American. Approximately 450 students in kindergarten though fifth grade attended this school; 27 full-time certified staff were assigned to Apple Valley during the 1999-2000 school year. The average years of experience of regular classroom teachers at Apple Valley was 7.6 years.

A series of events, referenced by all respondents, are summarized from newspaper articles published between July, 1997, and September, 1998. In July of 1997, two parents of Apple Valley students obtained the scores from the state-mandated achievement test of the school's third grade students. The test had been administered in the spring of 1997; results indicated that the average composite score from Apple Valley was 20 points below the combined average for the district's 13 elementary schools. These parents photocopied the test results and distributed them door to door throughout the neighborhoods of Apple Valley. Soon thereafter, parents from the school held a series of meetings with district officials and the school principal to discuss their concerns. Parents voiced complaints about lack of homework, students not being challenged by the curriculum, minimal communication with parents, and workbooks less than half completed by the end of the previous school year.

Other members of the community became involved in the discussions, including a state representative whose grandchildren were enrolled at Apple Valley. He and other school patrons challenged administrators to improve the school's scores. The school principal countered the challenge by stating that test scores were only one measure of student success. She also stated that the steady drop in test scores since the school's opening possibly could be attributed to the

presence of five apartment complexes located within the Apple Valley attendance area and the associated high mobility rate of children from apartment-dwelling families. Discussion continued into the opening weeks of the 1997-1998 school year, culminating in an hour-long exchange at the district's board of education meeting in August, 1997. District administrators and the school principal announced a number of initiatives to improve test scores, including the development of monthly curriculum guides for parents, standardization of district curriculum, and increased professional development efforts. The district also pledged to conduct an in-depth analysis of test scores to aid in the implementation of other improvement efforts.

In late August, 1997, the Apple Valley principal announced that her retirement would become effective on October 2 of that year. She was quoted as saying that she delayed this public announcement to ensure a smooth start to the school year. The principal denied any correlation between her retirement and the ongoing unrest regarding low standardized test scores by the school's third graders. In September of 1997, the board of education appointed a replacement. This successor, who began her first principalship upon the effective resignation date of her predecessor at Apple Valley, was still serving in her capacity as principal at the time of this case study.

The series of local newspaper articles came to an end with the final two references published in May and September of 1998. Both articles reported an increase in test scores among Apple Valley third, fourth and fifth graders and a reversal of the pattern of declining scores. The newspaper reporter noted that the scores were "dramatically better," concluding that "the issue [had] cooled" since its initial inception.

Participants

Interview questions were presented to nine faculty and staff members of Apple Valley,

including the principal. Three of the participants were support personnel, one was the school counselor, and four were classroom teachers. Years of experience in education ranged from two to 20 years, with four of the participants having all of their educational experience in this same school district. Two of the respondents were employed at Apple Valley at the time of its opening, and four individuals were employed at the school during the tenure of the former principal. Two participants were hired by the present principal within the past year and a half. Table 1 summarizes the demographics for this group.

Table 1

Background Data of Participants

Name	Position	Gender	Age	Race	Highest degree held
Lincoln	Principal	F	50	W	M.Ed.
Johnson	Counselor	F	41	W	M.Ed.
Cleveland	Teacher	F	32	W	B.S.
Kennedy	Teacher	F	59	W	M.A.
Monroe	Teacher	F	32	W	M.Ed.
Taft	Teacher	F	38	NA	B.S.
Hamilton	Secretary	F	43	W	High School Diploma
Buchanan	Secretary	F	40	W	High School Diploma
Washington	Custodian	M	40	AA	High School Diploma

Name	Years in education	Years in this district	Years at this site	Years with previous principal	Hired by present principal
Lincoln	20	20	1.5	-	N/A
Johnson	4	3	1.5	-	N
Cleveland	9	8	1.5	-	N
Kennedy	19	10	3.5	3	N
Monroe	8	.5	.5	-	Y
Taft	15	5	4.5	3	N
Hamilton	3	3	2.5	1	N
Buchanan	2	2	1.5	-	Y
Washington	5	5	4.5	3	N

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed in three ways. First, a summary was presented regarding responses that were voiced by more than one participant during structured interviews. Second, using the focus of the principal as a primary figure in the change process, an analysis was conducted in terms of what the principal actually did and what respondents perceived that she did. Third, the data were cast in terms of the original research propositions, using SEDL's (1995) Concerns-Based Adoption Model (CBAM) and Schön's model of reflective practice (1987) as lenses of analysis.

Data Summary. Using the process of coding and categorizing emergent themes from interviews, observations, and document reviews, the data sets emerged into two main categories. The first category, processes, included respondents' summations of how change was executed at the school level. The focus was directed on the overall change process, not toward any specific change as perceived by the individual respondent. Processes included respondents' summations of how change was executed at the school level. Respondents generally reported change as something that was facilitated by the school principal. These perspectives support the findings of multiple researchers who note that the principal is the key to promoting successful change in schools (Barth, 1990; Bennis & Nanus, 1985; Berman & McLaughlin, 1978; Boyer, 1983; Fullan, 1991; Louis & Miles, 1990; Sarason, 1996). Both certified and support staff concluded that first there must be a need for change to occur.

Teachers agreed that the principal was aware of the need for them to have ownership in the change process. First, teachers reported that the principal informed the faculty of any proposed changes and recommended procedures for change. Next, teachers noted that the

principal solicited input on how the change should actually take place. This was done on both an individual and a group level, with the general consensus that the principal was open to suggestions. Lastly, change was seen as a shared process that involved everyone within the school. These findings also were supported in the literature (Glickman, 1993; Hannay & Ross, 1997; Meier, 1995; Smith, 1999).

The second category, perceptions, was divided into three main categories: (1) The role of the individual in the change process, (2) the role of the principal in the change process, and (3) factors that contributed to successful change at Apple Valley Elementary. Participants tended to frame their responses in terms of their relationship to the principal. Teachers viewed their roles as those of clarifier, helper, and suggestion-maker. They believed it was necessary for them to assist in informing and teaching others about the changes, but that the principal played the key role. These norms of shared problem-solving, collegiality, critical thinking and recognizing the support and skills of teachers as key players are supported in the findings of Barth (1990), Bruner (1996), Glickman (1993), Lambert (1998) and Tyack and Cuban (1995).

Regarding the role of the principal, the key components included gaining input (listening), informing teachers of relevant information, communicating high expectations, and giving positive feedback. Such characteristics are noted in the literature (Leithwood et al., 1998; Smith, 1999; Wagner, 1998). Also mentioned was a focus on the students, a great sense of humor (fun-loving), and caring about others. These characteristics are also cited in the literature as key components (Bruner, 1996; Leiberman & Miller, 2000; Sagor, 1997; Sergiovanni, 1995; SEDL, 1995). The principal at this case study site also was seen as a person who communicated with the teachers on their level, treating them as equals to herself and identifying with the daily

needs of the teachers. These traits support findings by a number of researchers (Glickman, 1993; Hoy & Miskel, 1991; Rinehart et al., 1998; Siskin, 1997).

The principal herself reiterated many of these same characteristics, making particular mention of the need to promote teamwork and shared responsibility. The literature supports these areas of attention (McQuillan, 1997; SEDL, 1995). At the same time, she made numerous references to the individual circumstances and personality characteristics of faculty members. Her office area was arranged in a manner that promoted regular opportunities for interaction with teachers and other staff members. All of these considerations involving relationships are discussed in the research of Barth (1990), Farson (1996), and Kouzes and Posner (1993).

In terms of factors attributing to successful change, all respondents (except the principal) directly attributed the success of the changes implemented at this site to the present principal. Many specific responses overlapped with the comments they made regarding the role of the principal. Of particular note were the perceptions that the principal encouraged others and promoted a positive, open environment. Participants also frequently mentioned that there was a primary focus on the students. These perceptions largely deal with culture and are supported by the works of Bruner (1996), Duke (1998), Sagor (1997) and SEDL (1995).

Table 2 presents a summary of participant responses regarding the change process.

Table 2

Summary of Participant Responses

Area	Number of respondents
Change Process	
Done as a team	8
Principal communicates need/shares information	5
Principal gains input	5
Role of the Individual	
Facilitate/participate in dialogue	6
Helper	3
General Role of the Principal	
Listens	6
Shares information	5
Treats teachers as professionals	3

(table continues)

Table 2 (continued)

Area	Number of respondents
Specific Principal Traits	
Shows care/concern for teachers as individuals	6
Treats teachers as equals/remembers what it's like to teach	3
Holds high expectations	2
Factors of Successful Change	
The principal	8
Principal encourages others/promotes positive, open environment	7
Faculty focuses on students	4
Principal is easygoing/flexible	4
Principal remains aware of teachers' needs	3

Contextual Factors. As a function of creating a context for change, the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL, 1995) recognized four primary functions linked to contexts and the change process. Table 3 summarizes these functions and evidence from the data in support of same.

Table 3

Functions of Context

Area	Confirmed data types				
	D	R	I	O	A
Reducing isolation					
Schedules and structures that reduce isolation		X	X	X	X
Policies that foster collaboration	X	X	X		
Policies that provide effective communication	X	X	X	X	X
Collegial relationships among teachers			X	X	X
A sense of community in the school	X	X	X	X	
Increasing staff capacity					
Policies that provide greater autonomy			X	X	
Policies and structures that provide for staff development			X		X
Availability of resources			X	X	
Involvement in decision-making	X		X	X	
Providing a caring, productive environment					
Positive teacher attitudes toward schooling, students and change			X		
Students' heightened interest and engagement with learning				X	
Supportive community attitudes	X		X		
Positive, caring student-teacher-administrator relationships			X	X	
Parents and community members as partners and allies		X	X	X	

(table continues)

Table 3 (continued)

Area	Confirmed data types				
	D	R	I	O	A
Promoting increased quality					
Widely shared vision or sense of purpose			X		
Norm of continuous critical inquiry			X		
Norm of continuous improvement			X		

Note. D = documentation; R = archival records; I = interviews; O = direct observations; A = artifacts.

At Apple Valley Elementary, it was obvious that the first function of context, that of reducing isolation, was implemented in a variety of ways. Faculty meeting agendas, e-mail correspondence and district profile reports evidenced that teachers were encouraged to provide input on school wide issues. The physical layout of the school building and the location of teacher classrooms and grade level "communication pods" were organized to promote communication among teachers, especially within grade levels. Even the location of the principal's office to the front of the office complex and the location of the coffee pot fostered frequent, welcomed interchanges between members of the faculty. As cited by Bowditch and Buono (1991),

> People also surround themselves with various symbols that can communicate information to others. . . An arrangement of the administrator's office with a center for informal conversations, a display of personal memorabilia and decorations, and a relatively close distance between the chairs and desk, for instance, represents a nonverbal

symbolic mode of communication that transmits powerful messages to visitors. (pp. 85-86)

Other archival records such as the parent handbook and PTA committee listings also conveyed the notion that a sense of community was pervasive throughout the school. Interview participants, including the principal, repeatedly noted that teamwork and collegiality was very much a part of the central operating framework of Apple Valley. This belief was further reinforced by direct observations of interactions among faculty members and review of other artifacts such as photographs of staff retreats and pictorial collages on the walls of the faculty lounge. From my first day at Apple Valley, the faculty and staff was characterized by their easy-going, trusting, warm and welcoming attitude regarding my presence. The pervasive climate was one of unified beliefs: "We are a team; we are professionals, with a leader who treats us as her equal; we all focus on the students." Westhimer (1999) has observed similar phenomena within the context of a single-site case study and notes that such characteristics are "exceptional. . . because of their marked contrast to research that has consistently demonstrated the persistence of an ethic of privacy, autonomy, and lack of unity among faculty in many similarly organized schools" (p. 83).

The second function of context, that of increasing staff capacity, was confirmed primarily through participant interviews. Respondents spoke of the principal in terms of how she involved teachers in decision-making processes, provided resources to meet individual and group needs, and fostered staff development. These characteristics were supported by evidence of implementation by means of faculty meeting agendas and observations of interactions between the principal and various faculty members.

The third function of context is that of promoting a caring, productive environment. Perceptions of supportive community attitudes were documented within the school site's academic profile report. Specific evidence of community support was seen in the school's partnership with the local university in providing practicum students as tutors for children with reading deficits. Interview data was most prevalent within the subcategories of positive teacher attitudes and caring student-teacher-administrator relationships

The data revealed less evidence in support of the fourth and final function, promoting increased quality. Nevertheless, documented responses from structured interviews indicated that a number of participants recognized a shared sense of purpose. Norms of continuous critical inquiry and continuous improvement were mentioned exclusively by the principal.

Analysis of Concerns. Building on Hall and Hord's (1987) seven Stages of Concern, SEDL (1995) has provided a listing of interventions for responding to concerns at each level. Although there was no specific categorization of individual teacher levels of concern manifested at this school site, the principal's use of many of these same strategies was evidenced by direct observation and participant responses throughout the course of the study. A summary of the comparison is presented in Table 4. Within this table, items without an "x" indicate a lack of evidence. This does not imply that the implementation did not exist; rather, it was not observed during the time that this research was conducted. It should also be noted that there was no specific identification of a singular innovation being implemented at Apple Valley. Participants were queried about the change process in general, and each individual's responses were based on whatever perceived change they so desired.

Table 4

Suggested Interventions for Stages of Concern

Strategy	Evidence of implementation
Stage 0: awareness concerns	
Involve teachers in discussions and decisions	X
Share information appropriately (not too much)	X
Acknowledge lack of awareness/knowledge	
Encourage discussions with knowledgeable colleagues	
Minimize gossip and inaccurate information sharing	X
Stage 1: informational concerns	
Provide accurate information	X
Use variety of ways to share information with individuals and groups	X
Arrange visits with others who have implemented the innovation in other settings	
Point out innovation links to teachers' current practice	
Be enthusiastic and recognize the enthusiasm of others	X
Stage 2: personal concerns	
Legitimize expressions of personal concerns	X
Support personal adequacy via notes and conversations	X
Connect teachers with other supporters	
Illustrate sequential steps and convey attainable expectations	X

(table continues)

Table 4 (continued)

Strategy	Evidence of implementation
Encourage and support innovation without pushing to excess	
Stage 3: management concerns	
Clarify steps/components of innovation	X
Provide information on small, "how-to" issues	X
Suggest practical solutions to logistical concerns	X
Help establish specific strategies and timelines	X
Attend to immediate demands	X
Stage 4: consequence concerns	
Promote staff development (visit other settings, attend conferences)	
Provide positive support and feed back	X
Find opportunities for individuals to share their skills with others	X
Continue to share specific information relative to the change	X
Stage 5: collaborative concerns	
Supply opportunities for collaboration with others	X
Bring persons together who are interested in collaboration	
Use collaborators as resources to others	
Encourage collaboration without forcing others	X

(table continues)

Table 4 (continued)

Strategy	Evidence of implementation
Stage 6: refocusing concerns	
Respect individuals' ideas for improvement	X
Assist teachers to use ideas/energy productively	
Encourage action on ideas	X
Provide needed resources	X
Be receptive to changes or replacement of innovations	X

Within Stage 0, Awareness Concerns, the principal was observed to involve teachers in discussions and decisions. She facilitated discussions at faculty meetings, and several teachers mentioned during the interview process that the principal enabled teachers to assist in the decision-making process. As stated by a teacher, "We all have a voice. . . we have ownership in what happens." The principal appeared to share just the right amount of information so as to not overwhelm participants. The counselor reported, "She tries not to overload people with information."

The principal also minimized gossip and inaccurate information sharing, according to the comments made by her and several other respondents. The counselor described how refreshing it was to go into the teachers' lounge and not hear negative talk or gossip about another faculty member. In describing the principal's methods, a teacher concurred, "if you see something that could blow up, that could be irate, try to nip it in the bud before something happens. Don't let it get to that point." The principal also emphasized, "that [nit-picking] is the death of a school. I

mean, you can deal with low test scores, but when you get that mind set going in a school, where they're against each other, you're just in for a terrible time."

With regard to Stage 1, Informational Concerns, the principal provided accurate information and used a variety of ways to share information with individuals and groups. The counselor reported that "then, [the principal] meets with the grade level people, and then we have our different committees, and stuff on e-mail, and then we have staff meeting, and everything. And her door is always open and we can always go in there and talk to her." As stated by a teacher, "[the principal] is just real good about sharing the information, and it's typically a group process." A different teacher commented, "if you don't share the information, they don't understand why they're having to do this, you get a resentment, a feeling that now it'll fall through.... That, and just basically giving you the opportunity to think about it, to get with your groups and discuss it and just allowing you to help."

The principal noted these same methods throughout several interviews: "I sat down with the grade levels.... But we did talk about it at faculty meetings also.... So we looked at it school-wide, but I really started in meeting with grade levels to do the more intricate part of it, how we're gonna change things." She also was reported to be enthusiastic and recognize the enthusiasm of others. The counselor said, "she definitely is vocal about it.... If you treat your staff as they can do this and they will, and if you have confidence in them, they will. " A teacher stated that "there's not a lot of people here that are burnt out - they're still excited about doing what they're doing and still really wanting to be here and do what they're doing...." Another teacher commented, "everybody encourages one another, and that's very unusual, too." The principal herself reported,

> because they [teachers] are so - positive, and fun, and up, and doing what's right for kids, and I think we see it in our kids. I just think it - because the teachers are up, and they like doing what they do, our kids are happy.... I just think there's a lot of positive things here, that are from a lot of inner strength of others.

Regarding Stage 2, Personal Concerns, the principal was reported to legitimize expressions of personal concerns while supporting personal adequacy via notes and conversations. When a teacher spoke of coming to Apple Valley she indicated:

> At the beginning, it was such a chaotic time, the beginning of school, I had just had a baby, I was really stressed about everything that was going on, and I had been at North Elementary for so long and they were so used to us being there, I was just concerned that when we did come over here, that, I mean, I had teachers coming up to me, not having any idea what 'MR' meant. And, I just went in and visited with [the principal] and she said, "That's great. We'll do whatever you need."

A teacher also noted, "[the principal] is very concerned about each of us, and our personal life, too, if we want to share, and is just really a personable person." The secretary stated, "others just kind of look at you - she gives you the time of day. Other people - some don't. And she's always there for you - through the good and the bad."

The principal also was reported to convey attainable expectations while encouraging and supporting innovation without pushing to excess. A teacher noted,

> She has high expectations and she also affirms the good things, and reaffirms those. . . .All you can do is what you can do, and you have to know that that has to be good enough. If you have a boss that thinks that you should be able to do more than you

> physically can, you know, there might be a bad distribution of power.... I think there's a way to do that and not everyone can do that, it's a balance.

The secretary offered a different perspective: "She just kinda goes from there, you know, without sitting down and saying, 'We're going to change things.' I think it happens real, kind of in the background. Without people being aware of it, it's less frightening that way, because change sometimes is frightening for people." She continued by saying, "I think she tries to keep us out of the teacher loop a lot, which is a good thing, otherwise you - I think you end up with even more - trying to do too much."

The principal addressed her approach in this way: "I didn't come in with guns blazing, that we had to change it right then. We had to make some changes. But they knew that. They knew my coming in was going to involve that. So they were prepared for it."

From an overall perspective, components of Stage 3 strategies were addressed primarily by comments from the principal. This stage, Management Concerns, included such strategies as clarifying steps/components of the information and providing information on small, "how-to" issues. The principal described the process of improving test scores in the following way:

> And so we started with the third grade and looked at how we were testing, how we were preparing, when we were teaching things. And what we realized that a lot of things that were on the test, we weren't teaching before the test. And so, we revamped some timed things, we also put in place some things that we hadn't tried before so that kids weren't stressed out, they were more used to, you know, we put desks in rows, sometimes from January first on, we would do that, like once a week, or once every two weeks, they did things where the children couldn't ask questions. . .

A teacher noted that the principal demonstrated the ability to suggest practical solutions to logistical concerns. She said, "if you have a problem you can go talk to her and she will give you some suggestions or pull the person in to talk about the problems or suggestions, and that's just always been really helpful to have that." The principal and a secretary both affirmed the principal's ability to help establish specific strategies and timelines, and also to attend to immediate demands. One of the secretaries reported, "I guess that if there's something that needs to be changed, I'll say it quicker than anybody else. . . I'm one of those who will say, '[principal] this needs to be looked into' - and she usually does. I mean, you know, we're fast."

The principal demonstrated the ability to situationally determine timelines for change. She stated,

> When I first came, we had to make some changes immediately. Because we were under fire. And so, we revamped and relooked. I took basically third grade..., after we kind of got that in place we started looking at second grade, and first grade... we just started in looking at "If we're down here, then that needs to be included in site improvement in what we're going to do."

Three of the four strategies in Stage 4, Consequence Concerns, showed evidence of implementation at Apple Valley. Several respondents noted that the principal provided positive support and feedback while finding opportunities for individuals to share their skills with others and continuing to share specific information relative to the change. The counselor reported,

> People have to feel comfortable and appreciated, to not feel like they have to promote themselves, I think. You know, you have to have - if you have a boss that appreciates you, or you feel like you are getting feedback - you need to have feedback on what you're doing, because if you don't, you're wondering if you're doing it wrong, if you're doing it

> right. You might feel like you're doing it right but you don't know unless you have someone affirm that.... And I think she does that, too. She has high expectations and she also affirms the good things, and reaffirms those.... I come to school a week early, without pay, and I know she knows that... She tells me how great that is....

A teacher noted,

> We have lots of committees, and including parents on our committees, and lots of teachers on our committees, and last year I was on a committee, that, she even gave us a day off to go someplace else to decide what we were gonna do for our school - how to help the school and bring up our scores, and that kind of thing, and our committee outlined some things that we thought that our school could do. And we've done quite a few of them. We haven't done everything that we wanted to do yet, but I'm sure we will in the next one or two years.

In summary, the principal reflected,

> So we spend a lot of time - in the lounge, or in grade level or faculty meetings, or in my office - you know, just talking about things that we need to do. Or how we can improve this - or have we thought about this - they're pretty innovative, and willing - to do a lot of things.... I could be bragging on each one of them every day - the things that I see them do that are so wonderful...., but it's there... and their willingness, and openness.

Stage 5, Collaborative Concerns, was evidenced at Apple Valley in two of the four strategy areas. Respondents acknowledged that the principal supplied opportunities for collaboration with others, encouraging collaboration without forcing others. The counselor stated, "what we wanted to do is kind of a collective effort." A teacher said, "that's always been

real smooth that the people welcomed in here worked really well together.... It's just a very open school." Another teacher noted,

> I think the main job of our principal here, organizes..., meet, discuss it, talk about improvement.... Just send it back and let the teachers work on it. I think - I'm certain that, as a principal, that you trust, or you allow the teachers enough time that they know that they are professional enough to take care of the process. And it's not a 'beat 'em up with a stick' and demand that process gets done, but it's more of a caring, hovering 'do this.'

A different teacher concurred that "everybody encourages one another, and that's very unusual, too" while the secretary noted,

> [The principal] tends to let everybody kind of make those decisions in a while.... And she just kinda goes from there, you know, without sitting down and saying, 'We're going to change things.' [The principal] herself said, "but - I didn't come in and say, 'Do this and do that." We really talked about it. And looked at what we were doing, and what we thought we could do, and got input, and we sat down as a team and did it.

The final stage, Refocusing Concerns, was recognized to be present at Apple Valley through four of the five strategies. The principal was acknowledged as respecting individuals' ideas for improvement and encouraging action on ideas while providing needed resources, yet showing receptivity to changes or replacement of innovations. The counselor mused, "not that everyone is the same and that we don't have differences of opinion, but I think that our administration has a lot of integrity.... I think [the principal] is competent, but she's open to look at those issues that need to be looked at." A teacher reported the principal as saying, "'You guys can come in and tell me what you need or want, and where we need to go, and we can either do it

or we can't, and that's the end of it and you're not standing off in a corner as a group, talking about me, and coming in defensive and upset....' Yeah, it's definitely [the principal], the way she approaches it." Another teacher affirmed the principal's approach by saying "it's more of a caring, hovering 'Do this; I appreciate your ideas;' it's more of a shared process...." And, yet another teacher stated, "Our principal makes it easier. Whatever kind of leadership you have, they can be power-hungry and they make the decisions themselves; the thing that makes change successful is your leadership.... So, she has really hired a lot of really neat people."

In summary, SEDL (1995) lists 33 suggestions for intervention at various stages of concern. An analysis of the data collected at Apple Valley revealed evidence of implementation of 24 of these strategies. Thus, approximately 73% of the total strategies were observed to be used by the principal in facilitating the change process.

Reflective Practice. Schön (1987) refers to reflective practice as a "socially and institutionally structured context shared by a community of practitioners" (p. 32). He calls this "a world with its own culture, including its own language, norms, and rituals" (p. 170). Within this culture, practitioners formulate opportunities for practice, clearly develop directions and action goals, and define acceptable professional conduct.

Within the context of the culture at Apple Valley Elementary, a number of examples of these types of behaviors were found. Throughout the course of the case study, it became clear that a focus on the students was the predominant driving force behind the work of the faculty and staff. The principal noted that "the children come first.... I think above all, we have our eyes on the kids. And I think we have that common goal." A teacher spoke of how the principal facilitated the move of the MR program to Apple Valley, allowing the special education teachers to go about "sharing the information that we had that we feel is important for our programs and

our kids." Another teacher referenced her ability to "make it a comfortable setting for everyone. Not just for the faculty, but for the kids, too. And I think that's real important." Yet another teacher mentioned the principal's quality of keeping in touch with the students by being in the classrooms: "If anything, it will spark the interest that she has in children to know more - and she does that." When the secretary was asked what kind of changes she had seen the princpial make, she replied, "I think a lot in the way the teachers interact with the children." The custodian commented that . . . "our primary function is for the kids - to have a good, safe learning environment for them." The principal referred to the faculty's ability to maintain a positive attitude: "That they're [students] cared about, that the teachers care about what happens to them, and I think our teachers - express that in their teaching. To those kids."

The opportunity to make sense of practice situations was referenced by the principal when she noted that teachers began to utilize methods in their classrooms that simulated the procedures implemented for state-mandated testing. She reported how they began to practice test-taking scenarios as early as January when the tests were not conducted until April. Since low test scores had been a problem area in the past, teachers were encouraged to practice such situations as placing the students' desks in rows instead of groups, and to help the students become comfortable with not being able to ask questions during practice test sessions. This exemplifies Schön's (1987) "constructionist" view of education, or formulating new ways to approach unique situations (p. 36).

The principal also mentioned how she and the faculty formulated goals and directions for action. She noted, "We really talked about it. And looked at what we were doing, and what we thought we could do, and got input, and we sat down as a team and did it." She also discussed how she asked the teachers to help her shape these goals: "What do you see that we're doing

that's right? What do you see that we need to improve on? What are your concerns?" She acknowledged that everyone at Apple Valley spent "a lot of time . . . just talking about things that we need to do - or how we can improve this - or have we thought about this. . . " The counselor reinforced this by saying, "I think with the teachers, I think we have a lot of input in terms of change, and potential changes." One teacher cited a particular instance in relation to the low test scores and the need for change: "She even gave us a day off to go someplace else to decide what we were gonna do for our school - how to help the school and bring up our scores, and our committee outlined some things that we thought that our school could do. And we've done quite a few of them."

It was apparent that the principal had outlined expectations for what was to constitute professional conduct. She noted several times throughout interview sessions and in casual conversations that she did expect faculty members to speak positively about one another and to communicate in a professional manner. She stated, "I talk about it with any interviews I do - that this faculty doesn't have a lot of nit-picking going on . . . That is the death of a school . . . When you get that mind set going in a school, where they're against each other, you're just in for a terrible time." She also referenced the faculty's willing attitude: "They're pretty innovative, and willing - to do a lot of things. I don't know that it's so much their age with them this young or it's just their personalities. I think they'll be that way after they've been teaching 20 years." The counselor supported this belief when she stated, "I think that we live by example, we don't talk down to another teacher about another teacher, and I know that [the principal] doesn't do that. And I think the teachers are very professional. Whatever happens, we deal with it before it becomes a problem." A teacher also summarized these same qualities of the faculty:

". . . everybody's so open. There's no one that is talking bad about everybody else, there's not one that is trying to look better than the next person, everybody is willing to work and they want to do good - they want to do what they're doing."

Schön (1987) discusses how a coach must "particularize" her demonstrations and descriptions, fitting each circumstance to the student's individual concerns or situations (p. 163). In explaining the dialogue between coach and student, Schön reports that the coach must communicate at times by showing, and at other times by telling. In telling, the coach may mention new aspects of the situation, give concrete instructions, or make a judgment about the student's readiness to hear specific information based on her "reading" of a particular student. Showing most often involves the art of demonstration.

These "particularized" aspects of reflective practice were observed to be in place at Apple Valley Elementary. The counselor acknowledged that "only [the principal] knows what she is hearing from this person and that person, and it's a balancing act." She recalled a particular incident where a teacher had just had a baby with a disability, and the principal reportedly went to the teacher and said, "You shouldn't be here." She cited another instance where the principal said to a teacher, "You need to lighten up on this child. He needs to play more." She summarized by stating, "You really have to have a model." A teacher reported that the principal is "willing to listen and has good ideas of sharing of where to go and make it work and get it taken care of... If you have a problem you can go talk to her and she will give you some suggestions or pull the person in to talk about the problems or suggestions...." A teacher said, "I appreciate the fact that she continues to be a teacher. She doesn't put herself above us, but she continues to be one of us and I think that's how she communicates with us." A teacher, when discussing the principal's manner of instruction and administration, mentioned that she

used "different skills to match the teacher's personality." The secretary mentioned that the principal "was in the classroom yesterday, teaching, and she makes it so easy."

Summary. In analyzing the data, it was found that a majority of the respondents viewed the change process as a team effort, with the principal as a facilitator of dialogue and teachers as communicative participants. Faculty generally perceived the principal to be an effective communicator who showed care and concern for teachers as individuals while fostering an atmosphere of mutual respect and positive support for colleagues. These perceptions were supported by observations of the principal's actions and interview responses regarding her own beliefs and practices on a day-to-day basis.

Using SEDL's (1995) context frame, Hall and Hord's (1987) Stages of Concern, and Schön's (1987) model of reflective practice as the lenses of analysis, the original research propositions were examined. Every respondent viewed the principal as the central figure in the change process, and school culture was paramount in the shaping of contextual factors for successful change. Within the data types collected, at least one instance of every dimension of SEDL's (1995) Functions of Context were found to be present. Regarding the principal's attention to individual needs, a majority of respondents mentioned this factor as a trait exemplified by their principal. This belief was supported by the finding that 73% of the total strategies for individual intervention of Hall and Hord's (1987) Stages of Concern (SEDL, 1995) were utilized. Data analysis revealed that techniques generally outlined in Schön's (1987) model of reflective practice were used by the principal as well. No evidence existed to suggest that individual interventions were exclusively implemented prior to addressing the needs of the group as a whole.

Findings and Conclusions

Given the data and analyses, four distinct findings emerged:

1. The principal was recognized as the key change agent by all involved in the change process;

2. The principal purposively did create a context for change;

3. Although no one change was identified by all respondents and the principal did not acknowledge a specific awareness of varying levels of individual teacher concern, there was evidence of implementation of suggested interventions for all stages of concern; and

4. In dealing with individuals, the characteristics of reflective practice were less predominant than was the practice of interacting with teachers at various stages of concern.

This study was guided by three main research questions. Based on the findings, the answers to the research questions serve as the framework for the conclusions that follow.

<u>How does the principal create a context for change? Is school culture openly acknowledged as an integral consideration?</u>

Given the findings of this case study, it could be concluded that creating a context for change is a critical factor in successfully navigating the change process. Goal-setting gives focus to the need for change, provides the principal with vehicles for establishing norms for collaboration, and establishes the basis for measuring success. The principal can create a context for change by using the underlying cultural beliefs, attitudes and norms of the school to support the need for change. To do so, the principal must model his/her expectations through frequent and open communication and information-sharing, while frequently conveying expectations of mutual respect and collaboration for all involved. Within the context of this particular case

study, the principal took a proactive stance in promoting positive attitudes and the notion that everyone should support everyone else within the school setting. She openly addressed conflict and used such events as an opportunity to resolve differences and promote unity.

School culture was openly acknowledged as a critical factor in the change process. Beliefs, attitudes and norms surfaced as "common threads" voiced by participants: "We are a team;" "Teachers are professionals;" "We care about one another;" and "We focus on the students." The climate was one of open communication and respect for one another, yet many respondents emphasized the need to have fun as well as to focus on continuous improvement.

In what ways does the principal address individuals before considering the system as a whole?

Based on the findings of this case study, it could be concluded that there is no distinct sequence for addressing the needs of individuals or the group when managing change. Rather, the needs of both individuals and the school as a whole should be considered at all times throughout the change process. There are multiple factors to consider in rising to the challenge of adequately attending to both the individual and group dimensions. As a leader, one must simultaneously promote teamwork and collaboration, communicate information to all involved, convey an attitude of caring and concern, provide encouragement, maintain the ability to be flexible and open to suggestions, treat teachers as professionals, and continue to focus on the students. Within this case study, the principal stressed teamwork and collaboration from the very beginning, to avoid divisiveness, but addressed individual dimensions of need at the same time. The principal demonstrated a capability to merge the personal and professional, yet she could also distinguish between the two in deference to teachers' individual needs. She strove to be

accessible to the teachers, and was observed to confer with specific teachers or groups if needs or concerns were evident. It is significant to note that all of these factors may be conveyed in both individual and group contexts.

What other realities, if any, are revealed by this study?

It may be concluded that the although the frameworks of SEDL (1995), Hall and Hord (1987), and Schön (1987) are valuable in providing guidance to leaders in promoting successful change, they present only a partial picture of what is necessary. Within the context of this school site, focusing on this school principal, there is an ethos that these frameworks did not reveal. The principal's sense of justice and equity and her ways of caring for teachers and students are evident throughout the course of this case study. Yet, the selected frameworks led me away from focusing on this principal as an individual.

It was observed that, within the context of this individual case study, the principal established a common identity with the teachers. She conveyed the message that "I am also a teacher; I understand the daily challenges you face, and I will give you the tools to make your job easier." Sarason (1996) notes that "The experience of first being a teacher in no way truly prepares one to deal with the multiplicity of issues and human dynamics encountered in the principalship" (p. 143). A true conclusion, perhaps, yet a number of teachers in this case study mentioned this as being an important trait in the principal, in that she had not forgotten what it was like to be a teacher.

In addition, the principal in this case study displayed a strong sense of humor and was described as being fun-loving by several respondents. Barth (1990) concluded that

> Humor is sorely lacking in this profession, in textbooks and educational writing, in research, in state departments, in universities - and in schools. Yet, humor, like risk taking and diversity, is highly related to learning and development of intelligence, not to mention quality of life. And humor can be a glue that binds an assorted group of individuals into a community. People learn and grow and survive through humor. We should make an effort to elicit and cultivate it, rather than ignore, thwart, or merely tolerate it. (p. 170)

The conclusion is possible that humor plays a larger role in the development of culture and community with regard to the change process than has been emphasized to date in the available literature.

The Concerns-Based Adoption Model assumes that interventions must be related to the people first and to the innovation second (SEDL, 1995). It can be concluded from this study that such may not always be the case. Although no one particular change was identified by all participants, the majority of respondents cited the need to improve test scores as the greatest need for change within their school. This need for change was initially voiced by parents and district administrators. The focus of change may be dependent upon the origin of the recommendation for change itself, whether internally developed or externally imposed.

Recommendations and Implications

This explanatory case study explored the ways in which an elementary principal addressed individual teacher needs when implementing change, using the SEDL framework of managing change (1995), Hall and Hord's Stages of Concern (1987), and the basic premises of reflective practice (Schön, 1987).

This study has built on existing theory by combining multiple frames of reference and reliance on a wide variety of data sources, including primary and secondary sources, from individuals at all levels of employment within the school. In addition, the explanatory nature of this case study and subsequent data analysis eliminated the possibility that a priori assumptions would limit the scope of findings. The conclusions drawn from this case study added to the existing knowledge base by outlining the specific strategies used in promoting effective change at both the individual and group level within a school setting. Delineation of such strategies is helpful in designing effective professional development, both at the preservice and inservice levels for teachers and administrators alike.

The next study addressing the question of how principals manage the change process might examine principals who specifically promote reflective practice with teachers. How does this happen, especially since the structure of the typical school day does not encourage teachers to be reflective individually or with other professionals (Marsh, 1999)? Does such practice result in improved interactions with students, and successful change at the classroom level? G. Caine (personal communication, January 27, 2000) agreed that there needs to be more time spent with teachers and that the principal as leader is the key to teachers' comfort level in implementing real change in the classroom. He also stated that you must nurture community at the same time you nurture the individual through the change process. Additional research in this area might address the specific theory-practice links that are needed to assist principals in promoting reflective practice while simultaneously addressing the needs of both individual and group participants.

A review of the literature has revealed that few case studies have focused specifically on the individual as the unit of analysis with regard to successful implementation of the change process (Bakkenes, de Brabander & Imants, 1999; Leithwood, Leonard, & Sharratt, 1998).

Models for change that include individual considerations have not examined the issue extensively within a real-life context. Fullan (1998) has also voiced the need for case studies to examine contextually how change occurs. This explanatory case study has added to the knowledge base by exploring an actual setting where successful change has been implemented. Although no specific change was identified by all participants, analysis of the data revealed that a majority of the respondents identified the same characteristics of the principal as reasons that effective change was possible at this selected school site. Even though participants were not asked to identify a single change initiative and it was obvious that different respondents had different changes in mind, a sufficient level of informational redundancy was reached in a relatively short period of time at the case study site. Additional prolonged visitations to the school site served to further affirm the beliefs that the principal was the key change agent and that she employed certain identified strategies both at the individual and group level in order to promote successful change.

Further research in this area should take an in-depth case study approach to examine these same phenomena within the context of schools with a differing organizational structure, such as those at the secondary level, magnet schools, or charter schools. Since the focus of this particular case study involved a principal in the second year of her initial principalship, further studies might explore if similar strategies are implemented by principals who have held similar positions at more than one school site throughout their educational careers. Other variations in examining similar research questions might be explored in sites where the researcher focuses on a specific change as the common denominator among respondents. Comparative case studies might focus on schools implementing an internally-developed innovation, while another study may examine the characteristics of mandated change where the impetus is externally imposed.

Given the data from the respondents in this study, the actions of the principal are critical to recognizing successful change within the school setting. Attention must be given to certain aspects of individual and group needs in order to successfully maneuver the course of change. These conclusions hold powerful implications of practice for developers of leadership preparation programs as well as for school administrators already in the field.

Additional studies in this area might attempt to more directly link the basic premises of leadership and change theory with actual practice in the area of school leadership characteristics that support effective implementation of change. Currently, the best research and case studies of effective practice are not widely known by practitioners.

Fullan (1991) also states that the crucial nature of gathering data should focus on effective ways of getting information on how well or how poorly change is progressing in the school or the classroom. Implementation of integrated research/practice models would serve the dual benefit of providing researchers with more substantive data as well as providing rich information to practitioners regarding the process of effective leadership and successful implementation of change.

These conclusions suggest that school administrators should carefully consider both individual and group needs of faculty members when promoting a particular change. All who are affected by the change process must be aware of the need for change and remain informed and involved as shared participants. Cultural factors such as shared beliefs, attitudes and norms should be openly acknowledged as integral to the change process.

Discussion

This study has built on existing theory by combining multiple frames of reference and reliance on a wide variety of data sources, including primary and secondary sources, from

individuals at all levels of employment within the school. In addition, the explanatory nature of this case study and subsequent data analysis eliminated the possibility that a priori assumptions would limit the scope of findings. The conclusions drawn from this case study added to the existing knowledge base by outlining the specific strategies used in promoting effective change at both the individual and group level within a school setting. Delineation of such strategies is helpful in designing effective professional development, both at the preservice and inservice levels for teachers and administrators alike.

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